

2023 | Year in review



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2023 | Year in review



Over the course of 2023, Parks Canada achieved important milestones, marking significant progress in the establishment and operation of Rouge National Urban Park. As the park's first 10-year management plan cycle reaches its midpoint, evolving circumstances have brought both inspiration and challenges. Parks Canada has adapted accordingly, launching new programs, improving habitats and completing trails and infrastructure projects throughout the year. Amidst these developments, the Rouge has warmly welcomed thousands of park enthusiasts.

Let's explore the many accomplishments that enhance Rouge National Urban Park, leaving a lasting legacy for future generations.

Lindsay Rodger

Lindsay Rodger
A/Field Unit Superintendent
Rouge National Urban Park

HIGHLIGHTS AT A GLANCE



In 2023, Parks Canada:

- Opened a new and revitalized Twyn Rivers Day Use Area
- Launched a new volunteer bumble bee monitoring program
- Launched a native seed collection initiative
- Released the final schematic design of the new visitor, learning and community centre

2023 | BY THE NUMBERS

45,224

trees planted in collaboration with partners as part of 2 Billion Trees program

The Learn-to Camp team logged 15,460 interactions with people across the Greater Toronto Region. The total number of contacts since the program began has now surpassed

100,000

35

stewardship events focusing on planting and restoration, and removing litter and invasive species



416

snapping and painted turtle hatchlings released — a record-breaking year

55

juvenile Blanding's turtles released through joint Head Start program with the Toronto Zoo, bringing the total to more than 650 to date

6+

hectares of new wetland and riparian habitat restored, bringing the total since park establishment to 90 hectares

CONSERVATION

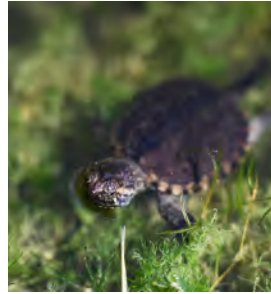


Much abuzz about monitoring

The Bumble Bee Citizen Science Program took flight in 2023 in partnership with Wildlife Preservation Canada and was a buzzing success. Armed with curiosity and passion, 19 volunteers completed 53 surveys, clocking 325 hours. The common eastern bumble bee stole the spotlight, constituting 54% of all sightings, while endangered species like the American bumble bee and yellow-banded bumble bee made special appearances. Notably, three locally rare yellow bumble bees were spotted, adding some thrilling moments to these vital monitoring efforts in the field.

Seeds of tomorrow

In 2023, Parks Canada launched a ground-breaking seed collection initiative to forecast and collect seeds from native trees and shrubs within the park. Staff completed training to become certified seed collectors and successfully harvested seeds from black walnut and bitternut hickory trees. In collaboration



Turtle protection

Building on the success of the Blanding's Turtle Headstarting and Reintroduction Program in collaboration with the Toronto Zoo, Parks Canada launched its own turtle nest protection, incubation and release program in 2020 with a focus on other at-risk turtles found within the park, including snapping and painted turtles. 2023 saw an astounding surge with 42 nests located and a record-breaking 416 hatchlings released back into the Rouge. To date, nearly 1000 turtles have been released through the program. Kudos to monitoring volunteers and vigilant staff whose keen eyes and dedication contributed to this momentous achievement.

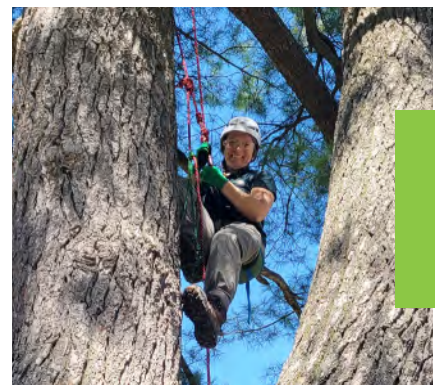
with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, seeds are then transported to a nursery for processing, storage and germination. In the future, the saplings will be planted in the park!



Tree planting

Rouge National Urban Park restorative work continued in 2023 as Parks Canada and partners planted a total of 45,224 trees through the 2 Billion Trees program. In collaboration with the non-profit organization 10,000 Trees, a vibrant fall planting event alone drew over 500 enthusiastic volunteers who planted over 2,000 native trees and shrubs to restore a one-hectare area near Wixon Creek in the northeastern area of the park. A huge thank you to all who participated!

Parks Canada staff harvest seeds from native trees in the park





Cultivating leaders in conservation

This year marks five years since the establishment of the Pauline Browes Future Conservation Leaders Fellowship, funded by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust. The award provides talented youth an opportunity to demonstrate their passion for conservation through employment opportunities with Parks Canada in Rouge National Urban Park. Congratulations to the most recent fellowship recipient Henri Lavallée who spent the summer engaged in monitoring species at risk bats, snakes and wetland birds.



Blanding's turtle release — 10th year anniversary!

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the Blanding's Turtle Headstarting and reintroduction program in collaboration with the Toronto Zoo. In honour of National Indigenous Peoples Day, Indigenous and community partners released 55 two-year-old Blanding's turtles into the park. Overall, since this program's start, more than 650 threatened Blanding's turtles have been released into the Rouge!

The 2023 removal of invasive phragmites was one element of invasive species removal that has begun in preparation of the Rouge Beach Improvements Project

Archaeology in the park

The Parks Canada terrestrial archeology team completed 11 weeks of fieldwork in collaboration with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and First Nations liaisons from Huron-Wendat and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations. The team completed six impact assessments for park infrastructure and tree planting projects. Among the team's discoveries was a significant Indigenous campsite dating from between the eighth and eleventh centuries and enriching our understanding of the park's past. To date, the Cultural Heritage Inventory Project has identified 48 new archaeological sites and reassessed 18 known sites, showcasing the park's rich history and cultural heritage.

ENGAGEMENT



Regulations

Parks Canada completed the public consultation for proposed amendments to the Contraventions Regulations for the Rouge.

The proposed changes aim to make enforcement of the Rouge

National Urban Park Act more efficient by adding an option to prosecute certain offenses through a ticketing process.

Thank you to all those who took the time to provide feedback.

VIBRANT FARMING COMMUNITY

All about leasing

In 2023, Parks Canada launched a new web page for Realty services where important information about leasing opportunities in the Rouge is posted for the public. This year, Parks Canada also signed the first long-term agricultural leases in the Rouge as part of an ongoing strategy to give farmers stability, empowering them to realize their full visions and business potential.

Through investments in renovations, equipment, crop management technology and restoration, Parks Canada is witnessing remarkable transformations that embrace the agency's core values and mandate.



Parks Canada staff tour Judy's Tropical Garden to learn about farming practices and operations



IN THE PARK

In 2023 Parks Canada welcomed visitors from around the world and connected with visitors through stewardship, programs and partnerships.



Photo:
Gary James /
Parks Canada

Model of success

Rouge National Urban Park is earning global recognition as a leading example of urban park success. In 2023, Parks Canada hosted delegates from the Korean Park Service and Australia's Parks Victoria, who were eager to understand the park's inclusive and collaborative approach. At the Commonwealth Study conference, the Friends of the Rouge National Urban Park hosted aspiring leaders from around the world and shared details of the park's establishment journey.

Park rules trending positively

Fortunately, trends are showing more compliance with park rules overall in the park, notably with respect to traffic and parking. Even so, there are ongoing challenges with littering and illegal dumping. Parks Canada is dedicated to enhancing waste management strategies and public education, and in 2023, we operated a full complement of waste management operations including the recycling of fishing line and cigarette butts. Overall, 406 dump sites were cleared, and 4,530 recycled cigarette butts and 2.1 km of fishing line were recycled!

Stewardship squad

The Rouge's volunteer stewardship squad showed their passion and dedication, participating in 35 events throughout 2023. From litter picks and invasive species removals to planting and restoration efforts, their commitment plays a vital role in maintaining the health and cleanliness of park areas. Hats off to their hard work and dedication!

IN THE PARK



Volunteers with 10,000 Trees and Parks Canada dig in to help rejuvenate the park



All aboard the Rouge Express!

After a two-year hiatus, Parks Canada was very excited to have Parkbus restore its free shuttle service to the Rouge in 2022. In 2023, ridership was up 35% from 2022, as 17 buses shuttled over 700 visitors to the park. In September, Parkbus hosted an event in the Rouge celebrating the expansion of NatureLink, which offers free and subsidized transportation to national and provincial parks for marginalized and underrepresented communities. To date, the program has provided transportation for more than 15,000 people across the country!



Photo: Gary James / Parks Canada

Rouge through the lens

Digital arts student Yuxi Ji is the most recent alumna of the collaborative Career Launcher partnership with OCAD University. In 2023, Yuxi spent most days in the park capturing stunning photos of milestone openings, conservation activities, events, wildlife and beautiful landscapes. Many of the beautiful images in Year in review are hers!



Learn-to in the Rouge!

In 2023, the Rouge's Learn-to Camp team worked in collaboration with many organizations, including Colour the Trails, the Scarborough Health Network, Toronto and Mississauga public libraries, Mountain Equipment Company and the Toronto Police Service. New Learn-to Fish programming reached more than 200 visitors, teaching anglers about rules, safety and ethics of sustainable fishing to prevent harm to wildlife. The Rouge's Learn-to Camp program also celebrated an incredible milestone — surpassing 100,000 interactions since its establishment!

PARK PROJECTS

Twyn Rivers Day Use Area

On July 14, 2023, Parks Canada celebrated the unveiling of the new and improved Twyn Rivers Day Use Area!



Twyn Rivers Day Use Area

Designed to ensure a safer and more enjoyable experience for visitors, features of the Twyn Rivers Day Use Area include new recreation and greenspace areas, improved trails, an upgraded parking lot, and permanent washroom facilities.

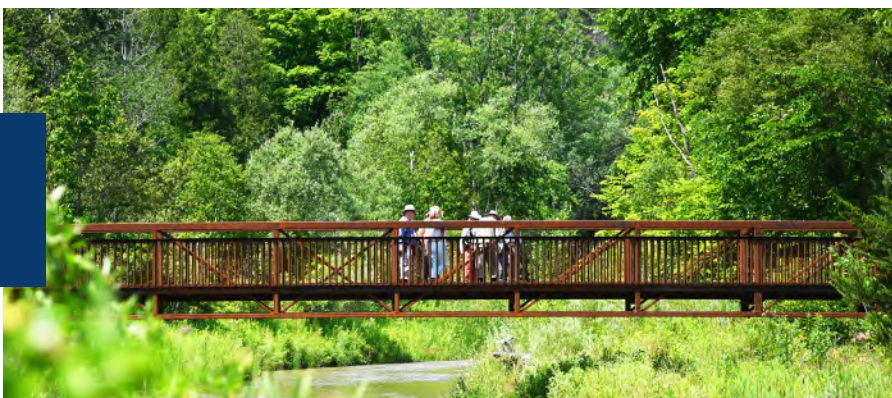


Twyn Rivers opening and ribbon cutting ceremony



The re-routing of trails away from the road, along with the installation of new pedestrian bridges and the soon-to-be installed crosswalk, have greatly enhanced safety in this popular area.

Visitors enjoy the new pedestrian bridge



Rouge Beach Improvements Project moves forward

Get ready to experience the seamless connection of nature, history and beauty at the Rouge!

The Rouge Beach Improvements Project is revitalizing one of the most visited and beloved areas in the park. In 2023, the project's detailed impact assessment was finalized and approved — a crucial step that outlines key actions to protect the area's environmental integrity. Ultimately, the Rouge Beach Improvements Project will provide a positive overall

benefit, restoring and connecting ecosystems while ensuring visitors have access to nature through the Rouge River and Marsh. For every square metre of new infrastructure built, Parks Canada will restore four square metres of highly degraded wetland and forest habitat, greatly reducing the human footprint in the area. Parks Canada sincerely thanks all those who participated in the public engagement process.

Visitor, learning and community centre



**Rendering of future
Visitor, learning and
community centre**

In 2023, Parks Canada released the final building design renderings for the new visitor, learning and community centre. The design incorporates beautiful, sustainable and universally accessible amenities, like indoor and outdoor multi-purpose gathering spaces that will bring visitors together to experience the Rouge.

Behind the scenes, Indigenous Creative Director Ansley Simpson began curating an immersive sound installation for the future centre. This installation will feature diverse Indigenous voices as part of the First Nations Voices Circle, a collaboration of artists sharing songs, stories and other recordings to showcase Indigenous culture. The next step is going out to tender!



Rouge National Urban Park

parkscanada.gc.ca/rouge